



**TESTIMONY OF DR. DAMION GRASSO
SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

Bill #6659

I am Dr. Damion Grasso, licensed clinical psychologist and Associate Professor with Tenure in the Departments of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at the UConn School of Medicine. In this capacity, I submit testimony in strong opposition to Bill #6659.

UConn Health has served as my professional home since 2011, when I moved back to my birth state to join the Department of Psychiatry as a postdoctoral research fellow. Soon after, I joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor before being promoted to Associate Professor in 2020 and receiving notice of my tenure just a couple of weeks ago. Throughout this journey, I have flourished in a rich environment surrounded by tremendous senior faculty mentors and colleagues – all of whom influenced my success as an early-stage investigator.

My research broadly addresses significant public health problems in Connecticut and beyond – interpersonal violence, trauma, and pediatric mental health. During my time as faculty, I published 62 peer-reviewed publications, wrote two books and numerous chapters, mentored more than 75 students and trainees at various levels of their career, and brought in more than \$6 million dollars in direct funding from federal and non-federal external research entities as a principal investigator. Further, my research, clinical work, and professional outreach has directly benefitted Connecticut residents and various state and community-based agencies, including the Department of Children and Families and the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Without the strong educational and research infrastructure that UConn Health provided me during a pivotal time of my career, I would not have experienced this success.

It is important to consider all the 'in-kind' effort that employees provide within an academic medical center such as UConn Health. As a principal investigator and faculty member, I put in well over my allotted hours in order to co-lead a thriving research lab capable of competing for external funding, doing good science, and training the next generation of researchers and mental health clinicians. Much of this is done on a shoestring budget, where there is simply never enough money to reach that comfort level. Externally funded grants are notoriously cut, and investigators must always be working on the next big grant while trying to manage the current ones. In fact, without the 'extra' that so many of my staff and students contribute, the work simply would not get done. All this to emphasize that any threat to the financial security of UConn Health is a direct threat to the research and education happening at our institution – accomplishments that we are proud of and that reflect on the leaders and residents of the State of Connecticut.

The actions proposed in Bill #6659 seriously threaten the financial security of the research and educational infrastructure I just spoke so highly about. As such, I advocate to (1) fully fund block grants for both UConn and UConn Health and (2) permanently remove the state's unfunded legacy costs from our operating budget towards making us more competitive for external research funding. It is important for Connecticut leaders to know that failing to do so will have serious negative implications for UConn's faculty, researchers, and all the students and trainees who are just starting their careers.

Thank you for your consideration of my position. For additional information, please contact me using my information below

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Damion J. Grasso".

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